

Message Text

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43

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL OPORTO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA

USIA WASHDC

USMISSION NATO

DIA WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 1167

USIA FOR IEU/MCLAUGHLIN

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, PO

SUBJECT: MEDIA-CONTROL PLAN PROVOKES OPPOSITION

SUMMARY: THE DRAFT OF A DECREE-LAW TO REGULATE STATE-OWNED NEWSPAPERS, DESIGNED TO CONSOLIDATE MEDIA-CONTROL ACTIVITIES OF THE AZEVEDO GOVERNMENT, HAS MET A NEGATIVE RECEPTION BUT WAS STAUNCHLY DEFENDED BY THE MASS COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING UP ON STEPS TAKEN IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE NOV 25 COUP ATTEMPT, MINISTER OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS ALMEIDA SANTOS HAS CIRCULATED A DRAFT DECREE-LAW WHICH WOULD CONSOLIDATE CONTROLS THE GOP HAS IMPOSED ON THE FORMERLY EIGHT STATE-OWNED DAILY
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NEWSPAPERS. THE DRAFT WAS BASED ON REQUIREMENTS LAID DOWN BY THE

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS.

2. BASIC PROVISIONS OF THE DRAFT LAW:

A. SAFEGUARDING THE RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS OF EACH PUBLISHING COMPANY.

B. ESTABLISHMENT OF LABOR CONTROLS FOR EMPLOYEES OF PUBLISHING COMPANIES. PROPOSED RULES WOULD PROVIDE, INITIALLY, FOR A MAXIMUM OF 45 HOURS AND A MINIMUM OF 36 HOURS OF WORK PER WEEK. HOLDING MORE THAN ONE JOB WOULD BE PROHIBITED.

C. HALTING THE PUBLICATION OF TWO LISBON GOVERNMENT-OWNED DAILIES, AMONG THE EIGHT STATE-OWNED PAPERS, AS WELL AS GROUPING ONE STATE-OWNED MORNING AND ONE STATE-OWNED AFTERNOON DAILY IN LISBON TOGETHER INTO A NEWLY CREATED FIRM.

D. ELIMINATION OF "DISTORTIONS" IN THE WAGE PATTERNS.

E. LIMITING PRESS RUNS SO THAT NO MORE THAN TEN PERCENT OF THE PAPERS PRINTED ARE RETURNED BY THE DISTRIBUTORS.

F. REQUIRED PUBLICATION ON SUNDAYS BY ALL STATE-OWNED PAPERS; PRESENTLY, NO LISBON DAILIES (STATE-OWNED OR INDEPENDENT) PUBLISH ON SUNDAYS, ALTHOUGH ALL THREE OPORTO DAILIES (TWO STATE-OWNED, ONE INDEPENDENT) DO PRESENTLY APPEAR ON SUNDAYS.

G. OBLIGATORY SIGNING OF OPINION ARTICLES, EVEN IF ONLY BY INITIALS OR PEN NAME.

2. PROJECT OPPOSED: THE JOURNALISTS UNION, THE STATE TELEVISION WORKERS, THE TYPOGRAPHICAL UNION AND OTHERS PUBLICLY CRITICIZED THE DRAFT LAW VARIOUSLY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF REPRESSION AND CENSORSHIP, AS CONTRADICTING LABOR LAWS, AS USURPING POWERS OF THE PRESS LAW, AND AS GIVING PRIVILEGES TO THE PRIVATELY OWNED PRESS. MINISTER ALMEIDA SANTOS GAVE A LENGTHY RESPONSE, PUBLISHED IN THE PRESS FEB 23, TO THOSE CRITICS; HE SAID THE PLAIN FACT WAS THAT THE DRAFT LAW CONFRONTED PROBLEMS WHICH HAD TO BE DEALT WITH. ONE OF THESE, HE SAID, WAS THAT THE STATE-OWNED NEWSPAPERS ARE LOSING SOME TWO MILLION

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DOLLARS PER MONTH, WHICH SUM IN EFFECT THE PORTUGUESE PEOPLE ARE PAYING.

3. COMMENT: IT WAS RUMORED FEB 23 THAT MINISTER ALMEIDA SANTOS SHORTLY WOULD RESIGN HIS JOB TO BE SUCCEDED BY HIS DEPUTY, LT COL FERREIRA DA CUNHA. ALMEIDA SANTOS HAS SAID QUITE FIRMLY THAT HE PLANNED TO CLOSE DOWN TWO STATE-OWNED NEWSPAPERS BEFORE

LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS ARE HELD THIS YEAR. IT IS PLAUSIBLE THAT HE WOULD TAKE THE UNPOPULAR STEP OF CLOSING THOSE NEWSPAPERS SHORTLY BEFORE LEAVING OFFICE. GIVEN THE NEWSPAPERS' CONTINUING DEFICIT OPERATIONS AND THE SURFEIT OF PAPERS IN LISBON, IT WOULD BE A MOVE WIDELY APPRECIATED BY THE READING AND TAX-PAYING PUBLIC -- EVEN THOUGH THIS WOULD CAUSE A PROBLEM AT THE PAPERS AFFECTED AND AMONG SYMPATHETIC LABOR ORGANIZATIONS. ALMEIDA SANTOS HIMSELF HAS SAID A NUMBER OF TIMES THAT ONE OF THE TWO PAPERS TO BE DISCONTINUED WOULD BE THE MORNING, BUSINESS-ORIENTED "JORNAL DO COMERCIO"; HE HAS NOT REVEALED WHICH AFTERNOON PAPER HE PLANS TO SHUT DOWN.
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